



Session update from Olympia – Feb. 20, 2011

Early Action taken to close budget shortfall

In these tough economic times, it's no secret that the Legislature faces increasingly difficult choices when it comes to balancing the budget. On top of the cuts already made the past two years, and with tax revenues continuing to lag as we recover from the recession, the threat of severe reductions and even elimination loom over every public service the state provides.

Against that backdrop, we're getting the job done in a series of careful, measured steps worked out by Democrats and Republicans in unison in both the Senate and the House. Agreement on one of the first of these steps came Tuesday in the form of early action legislation to shrink the \$550 million shortfall in the 2011 budget that runs through June 30 by \$367 million.

House Bill 1086 reduces public service expenditures by \$242 million and transferring \$125 million from other accounts. The remainder of the shortfall will be addressed between now and the end of the legislative session as lawmakers take up the even larger challenge of closing the nearly \$5 billion shortfall in the 2011-13 budget.

By continuing the bipartisan cooperation we've achieved so far, it is my hope that whatever decisions we reach will come through careful, fair deliberation that balances the diverse needs of our state.

You can [read more about the legislation here](#), see a summary of the early action items [here](#), and click [here](#) to listen to an audio clip where I outline the early action legislation during my weekly press briefing.

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PRESERVING THE GET PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS

I introduced a bill regarding the state's popular Guaranteed Education Tuition program, or GET, that lets parents buy college credits at today's tuition rates to finance their kids' future education at our state colleges and universities. Right now over 120,000 families have invested in GET units. But program is at risk due to the rapidly rising cost of tuition in our state higher education system. Currently the GET fund is only 86 percent solvent.

Senate Bill 5749, heard Wednesday by the Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee, creates a new funding model so we can keep the fund solvent and continue providing this great opportunity to help Washington families save for their kids' college education.

Under the current plan, 100 GET units can be redeemed for one full year's tuition and state fees at the University of Washington, the state's most expensive university. Units must be used within 10 years after the first unit is redeemed. Under the proposed changes, 100 GET units would be redeemable for the average of tuition and fees at all six of the state's four-year institutions and would need to be used within six years after the first unit is redeemed.

Units already purchased by Washington families will continue to be redeemed at the contracted rate at which they were purchased.

TWO OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WEEKS IN THE SESSION

The upcoming two weeks of the legislative session are among the most critical, for two reasons.

First, Feb. 21 is formally the last day on this year's legislative calendar to move bills out of policy committees in the Senate. Bills still in committee after that date are considered dead for the year. That doesn't mean a bill can't be moved out of a committee later in the session — which happens from time to time — but the process of moving a bill after that date becomes far more difficult.

The same applies for bills in fiscal committees, except that the cut-off date for those bills is Feb. 25. The exceptions to these general rules are bills that are considered "necessary to implement the budget."

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Announcing 3rd District Town Halls

On behalf of Representative Timm Ormsby, Representative Andy Billig and myself, I want to invite you to join us for one of our two Town Hall Meetings Saturday, March 12, 2011. The Town Halls will be at two 3rd District locations in Spokane!

10:00 a.m.

Northeast Community Center
4001 North Cook Street

CONGRATULATIONS EAGS, YOU ARE NUMBER 1!

Today, along with Senator Schoesler, I was privileged to introduce [SB 8616](#) a resolution congratulating our Eastern Washington University Eagles national championship football team and honored the student-athletes and their coaches for this historic accomplishment. Dr. Arrevelo, Coach Baldwin and several players and staff were on hand as the resolution was read. This team was successful on the field with their legendary come from behind victories, and off the field with a team overall grade-point average of 3.06.

As a former EWU faculty member, I was happy when I was presented with a football signed by the team, which I will proudly display in my Olympia office. In a legislative session that has been filled with the stress surrounding budget cuts, it was nice to take some time out today to celebrate such great news from the region. Below is a picture with the Champs and I on the Senate floor and click [here](#) to listen to audio. Go EAGS!



2:00 p.m.

Northwest Museum of Arts and
Culture

2316 W. 1st Avenue

Please RSVP to

3rdDistLegis@leg.wa.gov

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa".

Click [here](#) for contact information for my Olympia or Spokane office.

If at any time you decide you no longer wish to receive updates from me, please go to <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/subscriptions/member.aspx?chamber=s&member=brown> to remove your name from the list.
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